

look to their leadership, policymakers to have the courage of conviction.

My friend from Texas is right, this is an unending and unsuccessful political action; 3,309 are dead, the violence over the weekend has been unspeakable. The cleric, al-Sadr, has taken out his ministers from the government. That means the coalition government is on the brink of collapse. Why? Because the prime minister is stubborn and will not sit down with his cabinet and parliament and ask in a respectful and collaborative way for the United States to be thanked for its valiant work of its military and asked that we stand down so that Iraq can stand up.

What a tragedy: ego over common-sense. What a tragedy: the continued loss of life over big egos.

And so I say to the administration, we will not give you an unending mandate to continue the terrible loss of life of our troops, and the reason we will not do that is because we declare a military success.

I wear on my lapel the flag of the POWs, the celebration and commemoration of men and women still lost at war, still missing in action, some now who have come home, soldiers that are lost. There is a military success, a legislative initiative of H.R. 930 that I have declaring a military success, the discovery of no weapons of mass destruction, disposing of Saddam Hussein, and many other valiant efforts of our military. And then we must now move to diplomacy.

It is time now to recognize lives and patriotism rise stronger than egos and bluster and the sadness of the debacle in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, as a proud member of the Progressive and the Out of Iraq Caucuses, I rise to speak about the current situation regarding the Iraq War. But before I do, let me express my condolences to the families and friends and neighbors and loved ones who suffered such horrific losses yesterday. I speak of Virginia Tech University, one of the Nation's great land grant colleges, where we witnessed the most senseless acts of violence on a scale unprecedented in our history.

Neither the mind nor the heart can contemplate a cause that could lead a human being to inflict such injury and destruction on fellow human beings. The loss of life and innocence at Virginia Tech is a tragedy over which all Americans mourn and the thoughts and prayers of people of goodwill everywhere go out to the victims and their families. In the face of such overwhelming grief, I hope they can take comfort in the certain knowledge that unearned suffering is redemptive.

The war in Iraq has also caused a lot of unearned suffering in Iraq and here at home. This is the same war, Madam Speaker, whose proponents misrepresented to the Nation would last no more than 6 months and likely less than 6 weeks. This same war in Iraq, we were led to believe by the Administration, would cost less than \$50 billion and would be paid out of the ample revenues from Iraq's oil fields. The war in Iraq, the American people were promised, should have ended years ago with Americans troops greeted as liberators by jubilant Iraqis throwing rose petals at their feet.

As I and my colleagues in the Progressive Caucus and the Out of Iraq Caucus forecast at the time, the starry-eyed, rosy scenarios laid out by the President, Vice-President, and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld would come to pass in fantasy land, but not in the cold, hard world of reality which they refused to live in.

To date, the war in Iraq has lasted longer than America's involvement in World War II, the greatest conflict in all of human history. But there is a difference. The Second World War ended in complete and total victory for the United States and its allies. But then again, in that conflict America was led by FDR, a great Commander-in-Chief, who had a plan to win the war and secure the peace, listened to his generals, and sent troops in sufficient numbers and sufficiently trained and equipped to do the job.

As a result of the colossal miscalculation in deciding to invade Iraq, the loss of public trust resulting from the misrepresentation of the reasons for launching that invasion, and the breath-taking incompetence in mismanaging the occupation of Iraq, the Armed Forces and the people of the United States have suffered incalculable damage.

The war in Iraq has claimed the lives of 3,309 brave servicemen and women (64 in the first 16 days of this month). More than 24,600 Americans have been wounded, many suffering the most horrific injuries. American taxpayers have paid nearly \$400 billion to sustain this misadventure.

The depth, breadth, and scope of the President's misguided, mismanaged, and misrepresented war in Iraq is utterly without precedent in American history. It is a tragedy in a league all its own. But it was not unforeseeable or unavoidable.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1591, the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health and Iraq Accountability Act the House passed last month provides real benchmarks and consequences if the Iraqi Government fails to live up to its commitments. First, it requires the President to certify and report to Congress on July 1, 2007 that real progress is underway on key benchmarks for the Iraqi government. If the President cannot so certify, redeployment of U.S. troops must begin immediately and be completed within 180 days. If the President fails to certify that Iraq has met the benchmarks on October 1, 2007, a redeployment of U.S. troops would begin immediately at that time and must be completed within 180 days. In any case, at the latest, a redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq must begin by March 1, 2008, and must be completed by August 31, 2008.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, the Iraqi Government is not off to a good start. The Green Zone surrounding Baghdad remains insecure. Earlier this week, a suicide bomber managed to penetrate the security perimeter of the Iraqi Parliament and detonated a bomb that killed at least three members of the Iraqi parliament and wounded scores of others. Additionally, the market represented by Senator McCain as an example of the improved security situation in Iraq was turned into a killing field within days after Senator McCain's visit.

And yesterday we learned that radical Shiite Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr has reasserted his political power by yanking his loyalists from the Cabinet, a move aimed at showing his supporters he retains his credentials as an opposition leader and which increases the pressure on Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to loos-

en his embrace of the U.S. occupation, which many Iraqis blame for violence in the country.

These developments, Mr. Speaker, illustrate the wisdom of requiring benchmarks the Iraqi Government must meet to justify continued American blood and treasure in Iraq. Moreover, because those benchmarks are established pursuant to President Bush's policies, it is passing strange indeed that he would threaten to veto the bill since it necessarily means he would be vetoing his own benchmarks for the performance of the Iraqi government. He would be vetoing his own readiness standards for U.S. troops. The President demands this Congress send him an Iraq war bill with "no strings." But the only "strings" attached, Mr. Speaker, are the benchmarks and standards imposed by the President himself.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the enormous financial cost, the human cost to the men and women of the United States Armed Forces has also been high but they have willingly paid it. Operation Iraqi Freedom has exacerbated the Veterans Administration health care facility maintenance backlog; placed an undue strain on the delivery of medical treatment and rehabilitative services for current and new veterans; and exacted a heavy toll on the equipment, training and readiness requirements, and the families of the men and women of the United States Armed Forces.

The emergency supplemental acknowledged the sacrifices made by, and the debt of gratitude, we and the Iraqi people owe to Armed Forces of the United States. But more than that, it makes a substantial down payment on that debt by providing substantial increases in funding for our troops.

The supplemental includes a total appropriation of \$2.8 billion for Defense Health Care, which is \$1.7 billion above the President's request. The additional funding supports new initiatives to enhance medical services for active duty forces and mobilized personnel, and their family members. Included in this new funding is \$450 million for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/Counseling; \$450 million for Traumatic Brain Injury care and research; \$730 million to prevent health care fee increases for our troops; \$20 million to address the problems at Walter Reed; and \$14.8 million for burn care.

Unlike the Republican leadership of the 109th Congress and the Bush Administration, the new Democratic majority is committed to America's veterans. What's more, we back up that commitment by investing in their well-being. For example, the supplemental bill we passed included \$1.7 billion above the President's request for initiatives to address the health care needs of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and the backlog in maintaining VA health care facilities, including \$550 million to address the backlog in maintaining VA health care facilities so as to prevent the VA from experiencing a situation similar to that found at Walter Reed Medical Center.

We provided an additional \$250 million for administration to ensure there are sufficient personnel to support the growing number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and to maintain a high level of services for all veterans; \$229 million for treating the growing number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans; \$100 million for contract mental health care, which will allow the VA to contract with private mental health care providers to ensure that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are seen in the most timely and least disruptive fashion, including members of